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Employee Attrition at Ozark Fire Department

Bartlett J. Harden

Ozark Fire Department

Ozark Alabama

Executive Development

August 2009

Certification Statement

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

Signed: _____

Abstract

Excessive attrition rates can be detrimental to any type of organization. All organizations must strive to maintain a well trained and experienced workforce. The problem is Ozark Fire Department has experienced a high attrition rate for several years.

The purpose of this research is to explore the reasons for the high attrition rates and evaluate changes that will positively affect the attrition issue. The historical research method was used to answer six research questions. These questions evaluated reasons personnel continue to leave, and reasons others choose to stay. Surveys and interviews were the primary procedures employed for the research. The literature review revealed many of the same issues in the private sector.

The results of the research revealed many departmental issues linked with attrition and retention.

Recommendations to the organization included changes in promotional opportunities, insurance cost/coverage, opportunities for involvement, competitive salaries, educational assistance and support, and diversification of training.

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Introduction

Many organizations will at some point experience a loss of personnel. "Some amount of turnover is considered normal …in many cases, however turnover is dysfunctional" for the organization. (Buford, Jr. & Linder, p. 344) Key employee retention is critical to the long term health and success of your business. (Heathfield, 2009A, p. 1) Personnel leave for many different reasons, including but not limited to: retirement, career changes, death, salary increase, or migration to larger organizations. Loss of personnel occurs in all types of organizations and is not limited to any particular type or discipline, however suffering significant personnel losses can prove to be devastating to the organization. In order to efficiently provide the services to our community we must be able to maintain adequate staffing of trained personnel. The high turnover rate experienced at Ozark Fire Department (OFD) has created, or has the potential to create, a multitude of problems within the organization.

The problem is OFD has experienced a significant attrition rate during the previous five years. During the five year time span from 2004 thru 2008 the City of Ozark Fire Department experienced a 47% attrition rate. Twenty three of the forty nine total employees terminated their employment with OFD. Of the group that left, one retired, one went back to school, five changed careers, one left during recruit school, and fifteen went to work in other fire service

organizations. (M. Robinson, personal communication, March 12, 2009) Retirements, change of career moves, and personnel that find they are unable to contend with the rigorous training during a recruit school are acceptable losses. The area of concern lies within the large number of personnel that are leaving for employment in other fire service organizations. Dealing with these losses has affected the department and personnel in many ways. This research will focus on the time frame of 2004 thru 2008, although this is not a new problem for OFD. In 1999 this department began providing the initial training (recruit school) for its employees as well as for other departments in our area. Since that time OFD has hosted twelve recruit classes with sixty five recruits with only twenty seven of them still employed with this organization.

The purpose of this research is to identify the reasons personnel are leaving OFD, and identify methods of retention.

Using the descriptive research method the following questions will be evaluated: a) What are the attrition rates of other area departments?, b) What are the attrition rates of other departments of comparable size?, c) What is the attrition rate of OFD?, d) What can data obtained from previous employees of OFD reveal about their reasons for leaving?, e) What has prevented current employees of OFD from seeking other employment?, f) What costs are connected with the hiring and training of new personnel?

<center>Background and Significance</center>

The City of Ozark is a small bedroom community located in Dale County Alabama. It is the county seat for Dale County, covers thirty five square miles and has a population of 16,000. Ozark Fire Department is a full time career department with forty nine employees and provides fire protection and emergency medical services (EMS) for the citizens, customers of local businesses, and travelers. OFD is the only career department located within Dale County and

has mutual aid agreements with many of the volunteer organizations and Fort Rucker Fire

Department (FRFD). OFD provides these services from three stations located throughout the

city. Each station is housed with an advanced life support (ALS) pumper and Station 3 houses a

ladder company as well. Station 3 also houses the administrative offices, the training office and

classroom. Fire administration of OFD includes the Fire Chief, Deputy Fire Chief and Training

Officer/EMS Supervisor. The operations division of OFD consists of three 24 hour shifts, each

shift staffed by a captain, two lieutenants, four drivers and eight paramedics and firefighters.

On the western boundary of Ozark lies Fort Rucker, a large military installation that is the

home of Army Aviation. Fort Rucker is the provider of rotary wing aviation training for the

Army and has the largest Department of Defense (DOD) fire department in the nation. (S.

Brown, personal communication, May 12, 2009) In general Fort Rucker has been a provider of

employment for many people in the area for many years. It has also played a significant role in

the loss of personnel from OFD. (D. C. Barefield, personal communication, April 7, 2009)

FRFD has experienced a large number of retirements over the last few years and has reopened

many of their stage fields. This has led to large number of vacancies within FRFD and many of

them have been filled from personnel of OFD. The positions at FRFD are Government Service

(GS) positions and the pay and benefits are significantly greater. (S. Brown, 2009)

OFD has also lost a considerable number of personnel to Dothan Fire Department (DFD)

(D. C. Barefield, 2009) DFD is located in the City of Dothan, twenty miles south of Ozark, and

is a larger department (170 uniformed personnel) and offers higher pay, a larger variety of

specialties, and more opportunities for advancement (S. Ash, personal communication, July 14,

2009).

These two departments (FRFD, DFD) are the primary organizations that the majority of OFD personnel (ten since 2004 and twenty-eight since 1999) have migrated, although, some personnel have also left for other departments located in nearby areas. (M. Robinson, 2009)

The discussion concerning the potential topics for the research actually began prior to the attendance of Executive Development Course, the initial course for the Executive Fire Officer (EFO) program. The potential issues for research were discussed with Chief Barefield, and after deliberation of the different topics, the issue of attrition was decided upon based on the potential problems that could result from this continued loss of personnel. The main areas of concern associated with this issue include safety, performance, and cost. Consideration of these areas, can provide the relationship of this research to the following United States Fire Administration (USFA) operational objectives: 1) to respond appropriately in a timely manner to emerging issues, 2) reduce the loss of life from fire of firefighters, 3) reduce the loss of life from fire in the age group 65 years old and above, 4) reduce the loss of life from fire in the age group 14 years old and below. While many might consider this an issue that is outside the parameters of an officer of the organization, we must strive to be leaders and change agents of the organization. (FEMA, chap. 3)

<center>Literature Review</center>

While attending the Executive Development (ED) course in February 2009 many opportunities for accessing the Learning Resource Center (LRC) were available. The access to these resources allowed for the beginning of the research procedures and literature review process. A wide variety of literature was found utilizing the LRC, the Alabama Virtual Library (AVL), other online sites, and a selection of personal books and textbooks. Some information directly addressing the issues and involving fire service organizations was located, but the

majority of the information referenced this issue in the private business sector. Much of the

information regarding attrition and retention used the terminology turnover and in most cases

terms such as absenteeism, motivation, job satisfaction, and employee recruitment were also

referenced. In two of the articles retention was directly related to the recruitment of personnel.

In an article found on www.ddiworld.com Roy Griffaw, publisher of Rent to Own (RTO)

Magazine stated "if companies did a better job of hiring people with the right set of job skills,

they'd do a lot better job of retaining them."(Rentway's turnover turnaround, 2005, p. 23) In an

article from the same site Mary Beth Moehring commented that SYSCO's hiring procedures

were flawed. "… we really weren't interviewing for what we said was critical to on-the-job

success, …" (How sysco delivers, 2006, p. 6)

In a majority of the information regarding attrition and retention, competitive salary is a

vital part of the entire concept of employee retention. However, a unique concept was addressed

in an article written by Barry Sweeny (2008). In this article he suggested moving from only

providing educators with an orientation program, and mentoring support to a more complete

induction program. Attainable retention rates may be as high as 96% over a five year timeframe.

"Clearly, even when a district can not offer top salary, it can still effectively compete for and

keep the quality educators by treating them professionally and by expecting and supporting

effective employee performance." (Sweeny, 2008, p. 1-2)

Some administrators have the viewpoint that "high turnover is a mark of an effective

organization". (Ivancevich & Matteson, 2002, p. 205) This viewpoint is not shared by all and is

the subject of much debate. Turnover leads to many categories of losses for the organization

including financial, invested time and knowledge. (Heathfield, 2009A, p. 1) This is not to make

the assumption that all turnover is bad; loss of employees that cause problems or perform below

standard may be beneficial to the organization. Consider the topic from this perspective, "the issue of turnover needs to focus on the frequency and on who is leaving". (Ivancevich & Matteson, p. 205) Ivancevich suggest that there is no ideal method of retaining the more proficient employees, although this would prove to be beneficial to the organization. Other thoughts on this issue are that some turnover is considered normal and possibly beneficial, although there are no concrete facts as to what is considered to be a normal amount. There may be some benefit to turnover, including loss of troublemakers, and replacement of higher paid personnel for personnel at a lower rate of pay. (Buford, Jr. & Linder, 2002, p. 344-345) It seems that there is no data to show that these savings outweigh the cost that will be incurred in the recruitment, hiring and training of these personnel.

　　　If turnover is inevitable, why should organizations be concerned with the loss of personnel? Replacing personnel is expensive. Costs that will be incurred will include recruitment, advertising, additional overtime, testing, medical exams, and training. (Pinkovitz, Moskal, & Green, n.d., p. 1) A worksheet that allows one to compute the actual cost of turnover can be found on the following website: (http://www.uwex.edu/CES/cced/economies/turn.cfm). A number of other articles were found relating to the cost of turnover and most all were in agreement as to the fact that it is expensive. Some of the information involves the "hidden" cost or the costs that are not "assigned a dollar amount". (Employment Retention Strategies, n.dA., p. 1) According to this site the negative changes to productivity, customer satisfaction, reputation of the organization, and the morale of the other personnel can be "crippling to organizational finances and marketplace position". The estimated costs of replacing personnel ranged from estimates of 30% of annual salary, (Campbell, in press) to 1.3 times the annual salary. (Employment Retention StrategiesA, p. 2) Campbell also references cost of lost knowledge with

the exiting employee can reach levels of value as high as 50% of that employee's yearly salary after one year of service and increases another 10% for each additional year.

Not only is this department losing knowledge as well as experience. This loss of knowledge and experience is one of the most devasting to an organization. From the aspect of the author's organization OFD lost twenty-three out of forty-six line personnel or 50% of the staffing. If you delete the officers from this number, it leaves fourteen firefighters with five years or more experience. This in turn will cause problems later when promotions come about due to limited experience levels. Organizations must strive to cultivate and develop personnel who will become leaders. If this is to happen, "local government agencies must retain and accelerate the development of emerging leaders at a time when talent can easily leave, given the shrinking labor pool". (Benest, 2008, p. 20)

A "shrinking labor pool" as referred to in Public Management by Benest, (Benest, 2008, p. 20) may not indicate a shortage of applicants, but possibly qualified applicants. With the downturn in the economy and the continued loss of jobs, organizations may have many applicants to choose from. This in turn may not provide more qualified applicants. Quality applicants are not always plentiful. Organizations will need to work harder to keep the ones they have because finding good employees is difficult and replacing them may be more difficult. (Tan, Tan, & Tiong, 2007) Retention is important to organizations of all types. Within the fire service it may actually be more complex due to the "quasi-military atmosphere". (Griffeth, Jr., 2006, p. 75)

The theories for retaining employees varied according to the author of the particular article. In looking at some of the different viewpoints, one must begin with the money. Many of the other theories will vary according to the individual personalities of the personnel.

(Heathfield, 2009B, p. 1) Salary is considered a necessary component, but is not the only factor that enables organizations to attract and retain quality employees. (Griffeth, Jr., 2006, p. 76) (Benest, 2008, p. 21) The pay issue not only will encompass competitiveness of pay, but also other areas as well. One of these areas includes equity of pay; employees become frustrated if they feel the pay is not fair within the industry as well as within the organization. (Employment Retention Strategies, n.dB., p. 1) Another area of concern to employees regarding pay involves a structured pay range. Employees will have an idea of the organizational plans for them in the future. (Griffeth, Jr., p. 76) According to Griffeth additional important issues that are also part of the financial side and are a part of the benefits package include medical insurance (employee and dependant), post retirement insurance (employee and dependant). With the continued rise in insurance costs these are considered very important areas. (Griffeth, Jr., p. 76, 78)

Some of the other issues covered were those that had no monetary value or cost. These included respect and trust. People expect and want to be treated with respect, and trust is a vital part of the effective and open communication that is desired by most. (Heathfield, 2009B, p. 1) People want to be a part of the organization, they want to be "empowered" and have a part in decisions that are made that affect the organization. (Heathfield, 2009B, p. 2) In Benest's article in Public Management, he emphasizes a positive and engaging culture and creating a learning environment as important areas for positive retention. He refers to the "social contract" (employee retention) and that employees will stay as long as they are "learning and growing". (Benest, p. 21) Some additional ideas /theories presented involve simple rewards and recognition for employees which can be as effortless as an occasional "thank you". (Griffeth, Jr., 2006, p. 79) Most people crave additional responsibilities, this allows them an opportunity to grow and develop. This does not necessarily require a promotion, but allows growth of the

employees within the organization and development of additional skills. (Employment Retention Strategies, n.dB., p. 2)

Would it be a fair assumption to say that quality leadership/supervision plays a part in retention of employees? The research indicated that it is a vital part. More than one article discussed the potential problems that develop due to poor leadership. In Griffeth's article in Fire Chief he states "that lack of leadership, favoritism, and inconsistency-all characteristics of poor leadership- were factors that would cause them to consider seeking employment with another fire department". In the article Top Ten Ways to Retain Your Great Employees, Heathfield suggest that the quality of supervision has a fundamental association to retention. In fact she states "people leave managers and supervisors more often than they leave companies or jobs". (Heathfield, 2009A, p. 1) Organizations should strive to educate the supervisors on issues of personnel management. This may require the attendance in special classes through their local fire training academy or the National Fire Academy. (Griffeth, Jr., 2006, p. 79)

The last issue to be discussed is employee satisfaction. In more than one article and textbook the issue of employee satisfaction was discussed. It seems to have a significant influence on the attrition and retention issues. Issues that cause dissatisfaction within the organization are often reasons employees leave. (Employment Retention Strategies, n.d.B, p. 1) Employees that are satisfied will be less likely to leave the organization. (Schermerhorn, Jr., Hunt, & Osborn, 2004, p. 101) In an article by Heathfield, satisfaction/dissatisfaction was listed as one the top three reasons employees leave an organization. (Heathfield, 2009C, p. 1) Dissatisfaction can be a result of low call volume in small departments which leads to workers having to do routine events such as cleaning and routine maintenance of equipment and facilities. (Griffeth, Jr., 2006, p. 78)

Employee retention is a difficult task and commitment to employee retention is an organizational commitment and must have support from the CEO/Chief/Manager of the organization. (Perman, 2008) The problem of retaining employees is not a task that will be solved overnight and has many different aspects. Organizations must remain vigilant in the process and dedicated to the fact that employees want to be treated in a respectful manner. Utilizing the "Golden Rule" in the treatment of employees and supervisors treating the employees like they want to be treated themselves is vital to keeping the employees committed. (Employment Retention Strategies, n.d.C, p. 3)

Literature Review Summary

The literature research and review for this project produced a vast amount of information concerning the topics of attrition and retention. The information located primarily referenced the topic from the private sector viewpoints. Very little fire service information was located related to the topics of attrition and retention, except in the volunteer fire department setting. This is not to imply that the information can not be applied to the fire service. The literature review revealed many variables in the process of retention of employees in the private sector, many of which could be adopted by the public sector.

The reviewed articles covered topics such as: salaries, benefits, leadership qualities, job satisfaction/dissatisfaction, and appreciation / recognition. The review of these articles and topics revealed a significant number of areas that organizations can improve upon, which could lead to improved retention of employees.

<center>Procedures</center>

The problem statement was reviewed to ensure that it met the requirements for this applied research project. This applied research project was accomplished utilizing the

historical research method to determine a) What are the attrition rates of other area

departments?, b) What are the attrition rates of other departments of comparable size?, c) What is

the attrition rate of OFD?, d) What can data obtained from previous employees of OFD reveal

about their reasons for leaving?, e) What has prevented current employees of OFD from seeking

other employment?, f) What costs are connected with the hiring and training of new personnel?

The primary objectives of this research were to determine the factors that have led to the

excessive attrition rates within OFD. Researched literature explored many potential factors as to

why employees are motivated to leave an organization.

The procedures employed to accomplish this research include literature review, surveys

of previous employees, personal communication with other area departments and other similar

size departments, and interviews with current OFD employees.

Literature Review

The literature review process began at the LRC in February 2009 while attending class at

the National Fire Academy. This literature review process continued upon return to Ozark

utilizing the department's library, the Ozark –Dale County Public Library, the AVL, internet

sources and the researcher's personal collection of books.

As articles and books were reviewed, significant information was highlighted and the

articles and books were indexed and filed. Resources utilized for research and review included

online resources, professional journals, magazine articles, textbooks, personal interviews, and

surveys. References were documented appropriately utilizing the *Publication Manual of the

American Psychological Association* 5th edition.

Personal Interviews & Surveys

An attempt was made to interview each line firefighter and supervisor within the department. All were interviewed with the exception of four probationary firefighters, who were just completing recruit school. A standardized form was developed and can be viewed as Appendix A. The form rated each employee's satisfaction level of ten different topics. In addition, a series of questions was asked with each respondent providing the answers.

The four career departments, located within the surrounding counties, were contacted via telephone to obtain information concerning the attrition rates of each. A list of comparable size departments and contact information was obtained from the Alabama Fire College. A total of thirty two departments were on the list. Of the thirty two, ten were eliminated due to the fact they were volunteer departments. Each of the other twenty two was contacted and data obtained from ten or 45 percent of the departments. Within the other twelve departments, the chief was unavailable and/or did not return my call.

The City Clerk for the City of Ozark was interviewed and information dealing with costs directly related to the hiring and training of new employees, and a list of employees who terminated employment during the years 2004 thru 2008 was compiled. Of the twenty three employees who had left, twelve or 52 percent were located and contacted. A survey for previous employees (see Appendix B) was developed utilizing Question Pro, an internet survey company. This survey was sent to nine or 75 percent who were able to provide a current e-mail address. All nine responded promptly to the internet survey.

Assumptions and Limitations

The research revealed a limited amount of printed material dealing with attrition and retention within the fire service. Although, a vast amount of information was located involving

the private sector, much of which reveals many of the same problems and complications

encountered within the fire service.

The opportunity for gaining information from previous employees was limited due to the

ability to contact each of them was unavailable. Only nine of the twenty three or 39 percent

were found or provided an e-mail address.

Results

1. What are the attrition rates of other area departments? The four counties directly

surrounding Dale County include Barbour, Pike, Coffee, and Houston. Each of these counties

has one paid department. These departments include Eufaula (Barbour County), Troy (Pike

County), Enterprise (Coffee County), and Dothan (Houston County). All of these departments,

other than Dothan, are similar in size to OFD. The research revealed that during the years 2004

thru 2008, both Eufaula and Enterprise had suffered losses as great as or greater than what OFD

had experienced. Enterprise lost twenty eight of fifty three (53 percent) of their personnel.

During the same time frame Eufaula lost thirty seven of fifty (74 percent) of their personnel.

Statistically, Troy fared much better, losing only six of thirty (2 percent) of their personnel.

Dothan, which is the largest department in the area, has a total staffing of 170 personnel and lost

only one person (less than 1 percent) during this time frame.

2. What are the attrition rates of other departments of comparable size? Information from

the Alabama Fire College and Personnel Standards Commission database revealed a total of

thirty two departments of similar size within the State of Alabama. Ten of these departments

were eliminated from the research due to the fact the departments were either military or

volunteer departments. An attempt was made to contact the other twenty two. Data obtained

from ten of these departments revealed only two with greater losses than those experienced at

OFD. The two departments (Enterprise and Eufaula) in this category are the same two

mentioned in the previous question. Results are located in Table 1.

Department	Total Personnel	Personnel Lost	Percentage Lost
Concord	49	0	0
Irondale	52	0	0
Russellville	53	2	3.7
Muscle Shoals	49	2	4
Guntersville	46	4	9
Atmore	45	6	13
Brewton	51	7	14
Fort Payne	50	7	14
Enterprise	53	28	53
Eufaula	50	37	74

Table 1. Personnel losses from similar size departments

3. What is the attrition rate of OFD? A review of personnel records for the years 2004

thru 2008 confirmed that attrition at OFD was a significant problem. The personnel records for

the researched time frame revealed the department lost a total of twenty three of the forty nine

uniformed personnel (47 %).

4. What can data obtained from previous employees of OFD reveal about their reasons for leaving? A survey was designed utilizing Question Pro, an online survey company. The survey asked a series of questions that referenced years of service, areas that affected their decision to terminate employment, and levels of satisfaction in several different areas. Question two of the survey was "Which of the following influenced your decision to leave Ozark Fire Department?" and included eight choices. Those choices included (1) salary, (2) benefits, (3) insurance (cost/coverage), (4) promotional opportunities, (5) department size, (6) department leadership, (7) educational opportunities (8) other. The individuals were advised that selection of more than one answer was allowable. Results are listed in Table 2.

Reasons influencing decision	Number of respondents	Number selected
Salary	9	6
Benefits	9	4
Insurance cost/coverage	9	5
Promotional opportunities	9	3
Department size	9	0
Department leadership	9	2
Educational opportunities	9	0
Other	9	4

Table 2. Previous employee data

The fourth question of the survey asked the participants to rate their satisfaction level in a number of different areas. Participants were instructed to check the appropriate box relating to their satisfaction level in each of the categories.   Data relating to this question can be found below in Table 3.

	Very Unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Total Responses
Salary	2	1	2	4	0	9
Leave time	0	1	2	6	0	9
Leave Availability	0	0	2	6	0	8
Insurance Cost	3	3	2	1	0	9
Insurance Coverage	1	0	4	3	1	9
Promotional Opportunities	3	2	2	2	0	9
Department Size	0	3	2	4	0	9
Department Leadership	1	1	4	1	2	9
Educational Opportunities	0	1	1	3	4	9
Treatment by Coworkers	0	0	0	4	4	8
Shift Assignment	1	0	0	4	4	9
Shift Supervisor	0	1	0	4	4	9
Organizations Concern for Safety	0	1	1	5	2	9

Table 3 Previous employee survey results

The third question of the survey asked the participants to list the primary reason the left OFD.

Salary and insurance costs were the primary reasons listed.

5. What has prevented current employees of OFD from seeking other employment? A standardized list of questions was developed and a face to face interview of all current employees of OFD, other than the four new recruits, was carried out. The first portion of the interview consisted of a series of ten topics to which each employee rated their satisfaction level. These topics included: the department (overall), their current position, salary & benefits, insurance, retirement options, leave time, opportunities for involvement, supervisors, leadership, and organizational direction. Their satisfaction levels of each of these topics were rated as: poor, fair, neutral, good, and excellent. The results of this portion of the interview can be found in Table 4 below.

Topics	Very Unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Total Responses
Department Overall	0	1	10	25	3	39
Position	1	1	8	21	8	39
Salary/benefits	0	10	17	11	1	39
Insurance	4	3	9	18	5	39
Retirement Options	0	1	7	22	9	39
Leave time	0	2	4	20	13	39
Involvement	1	8	8	12	10	39
Supervisors	0	3	4	19	13	39
Leadership	2	9	12	13	3	39
Organizational Direction	1	6	16	12	4	39

Table 4. Current employee interview results

The second portion of the interview consisted of a series of five open ended questions. The first question in the series asked, "What do you think is the primary reason personnel leave OFD?". The overwhelming reply was salary. Only three of the thirty nine interviewed answered anything but salary.

The interview form listed question number two as, "If you could change one issue, other than salary, that would positively impact the attrition rate what would it be?". There were a number of variations in the answers to this question. Some had no idea what could be done, while many of the others had definite opinions concerning this question. The results can be located below in Table 5. Each individual was interviewed privately and assured all responses would be confidential. No names were attached to the individual interview sheets. The promotional issues were concerns about the availability of promotional opportunities as well as a concern that the promotional process was not an equal opportunity process. Leadership issues were not recorded as specific leadership issues, but only as concerns about the leadership and direction of the organization. As expected, Insurance proved to be an area of concern. Many expressed concerns with the current coverage and the cost of family coverage.

OFD is similar to many other departments; it often seems that there is much animosity among the shifts, almost to the point that it is three different departments instead of one department with three shifts. The concerns about opportunities for involvement were that only certain groups were utilized for special projects or in the decision making process on departmental issues. OFD has frequent certification classes and many classes, available through the Alabama Fire College, can and have been taught here. Some personnel had concerns about training budget cuts, and diversifying the training to include the technical rescue courses.

Question number four asked "What would make the workplace better?". This question did not restrict the individuals to one response. They were allowed to provide as many different answers as they wanted. The responses included some areas addressed previously in question two, while many of the others followed different avenues of thought. Previously covered areas included, leadership/direction of the organization, attitudes/cohesiveness of the shifts, promotional equality, and diversity of training. Other thoughts included, educational opportunities such as tuition assistance, station improvements, technology and equipment upgrades, and some minor changes that seem important to the personnel. These minor changes included the ability to "swap time", lifting the restrictions on personnel going to a restaurant and sitting down to eat while on duty, and changing uniform style.

6. What costs are connected with the hiring and training of new personnel? The City Clerk/Personnel Director for the City of Ozark provided the data to develop the hiring and training cost of personnel. These figures are based on the fall 2007 hiring of personnel. These figures include the newspaper advertisement, cost of pre-employment testing, medical physicals, and background investigations. Some of these costs would be consistently the same while others will vary according to the number of potential recruits. Also included in these cost will be recruit salaries and benefits, recruit certification testing, instructor salaries and benefits, and apparatus usage cost. These costs located in Table 6 were incurred in the hiring of four personnel.

Categories	Costs
Advertisement	860.00
Pre-employment testing (tested 72 applicants)	1250.00
Medical physicals (6 recruits tested, 2 failed)	1428.00

Background investigations	48.00
Recruit salaries/benefits	50,800.00
Instructor salaries/benefits	21,625.00
Apparatus usage cost (estimates based on Current federal rate divided in half)	2550.00
Total cost	78,561.00
Cost per recruit	19,640.25

Table 6. Hiring and training cost of new recruits.

Discussion

How can organizations affectively control the issues of attrition and retention? It is not

nor will it be an issue that can be totally eliminated. Organizations must realize that

turnover/attrition has negative effects on the organization in many different categories.

(Heathfield, 2009A, p. 1) To be successful in the retention battle, organizations must be

committed to employee retention at the top levels of management. (Perman, 2008) The research

revealed many different theories for the retention of employees, including but not limited to,

salaries. Competitive salaries are a vital part, but employees also expect to be treated with

respect and trust. (Heathfield, 2009B, p. 1)

Salaries are a necessary and vital part of the retention of quality employees. (Griffeth, Jr.,

2006, p. 76)(Benest, 2008, p. 21) Competitive salaries and equity of pay (Employment

Retention Strategies, n.d.B, p. 1) are both important areas of the salary aspect. Employees want

to know they are being treated fairly within the organization as well as the industry as a whole.

(Employment Retention Strategies, p. 1) Another element of salaries includes the long range

plan; employees want a structured pay range to provide them with future plans of the organization. (Griffeth, Jr., p. 76)

The benefits package is another area of great concern of the employees. Organizations can benefit from the ability to provide low cost/no cost quality insurance for the employee and dependant. (Table 2, p.20, Table 5, p. 22) Post retirement insurance for the employee and dependant are also areas employees have shown concerns. (Griffeth, Jr., 2006, p. 76, 78)

Can dissatisfaction with supervisors and/or with leadership of an organization impact the attrition/retention issue? Research indicates it can definitely have an effect. Effects can be positive or negative. Several articles addressed the issue of and problems that result from poor leadership. Problems and inconsistency of leadership has the potential to cause employees to seek employment with other organizations. (Griffeth, Jr., 2006, p. 78) The survey of previous employees utilized during this research (Appendix B) revealed that 89 percent of the respondents were satisfied with their direct supervisor (Table 3, p. 20), while only 33 percent were satisfied with the department leadership (Table 3, p.20). In the face to face interview with current employees (Appendix A) 82 percent of the individuals rated their satisfaction level of their direct supervisor as good or excellent, while only 33 percent gave the same rating to the leadership. (Table 4, p. 21) The second portion of the interview (Appendix A) consisted of open ended questions with the respondents providing the answer. In this section, only 18 percent identified departmental leadership as a problem area. (Table 5, p. 22)

Beginning in elementary school, many people were provided guidance regarding the treatment of the people around us, utilizing the "Golden Rule". In an online article by Employment Retention Strategies, this type of treatment is vital to the retention of employees. (Employment Retention Strategies, n.d.C, p. 3) Employees not only want to be treated with trust

and respect, they expect to be treated in that fashion. (Heathfield, 2009B, p. 1) Appropriate

treatment is also linked to job satisfaction. Responsibilities and the opportunity to grow and

develop are craved by many, (Employment Retention Strategies, n.d.B, p. 2) and people want to

be a part of the organization. They want to be included in the decision making; they want to be

"empowered". (Heathfield, 2009B, p. 2) In the current employee interviews, each was asked

about their satisfaction with the opportunities for involvement, 56 percent rated it as good or

excellent. (Table 4, p. 21) Satisfied employees are not as likely to leave their organizations.

(Schermerhorn, Jr. et al., 2004, p. 101) This satisfaction stems from many different areas

including run volume, (Griffeth, Jr., 2006, p. 78) which could be a problem area in many smaller

departments.

Costs of turnover/attrition can't be ignored. Some of these costs can be assigned a dollar

figure, while many can not. (Employment Retention Strategies, n.d.A, p. 1) Financial costs

include the costs incurred for replacing an employee. Some of these costs will include cost of

advertising positions, pre-employment testing, physicals (medical), background investigations,

salaries & benefits during training, actual training costs. Research revealed a cost of $19,640.25

per recruit during the last hiring at the author's department. (Table 6, p. 24) Using these cost for

recruits as an average, the five year time frame of the research resulted in a total cost of

$451,720.00 to OFD. Non financial costs would include loss of knowledge and experience.

This can lead to other problems, in later days, due to the large number of inexperienced

personnel that may be promoted to an officer position. Organizations need to work at retaining

and developing future leaders of the organization. (Benest, 2008, p. 20) Other non financial

costs may be lost productivity, lack of customer satisfaction, damage to the organizations

reputation and the morale of the remaining employees. (Employment Retention Strategies, n.d.A, p. 1)

Many of the necessary changes needed to curb attrition and improve retention will need to take place within organizational management and within city administration. The salary issue is definitely one of the major driving forces. For many of the smaller cities and departments this will be a difficult issue to resolve especially with the current economic status. Providing the necessary training to develop officers and leaders of the organization should be a primary objective of the organization. Developing a plan for employee involvement and methods of showing appreciation of employees will help maintain satisfaction levels.

Recommendations

During the time of this research, a number of areas of particular concern regarding the issue of attrition and retention of personnel became more evident. Three of these areas that could potentially cause the most problems are: safety, performance, and financial. The safety and performance issues have the same basic cause. This cause is the lack of experienced personnel. All career firefighters in the State of Alabama are required to complete a recruit school/minimum standard school within the first year of employment. This is only the building block for other schools and experience achieved while performing the job. The lack of this experience could lead to severe safety issues, which could lead to injuries or death to the firefighters and or citizens. Performance issues could lead to a loss of confidence and support of the citizens and could lead to funding problems. The financial side is self explanatory, spending in excess of $450,000 dollars to replace personnel who are leaving for other organizations should have been addressed before it reached that level.

This research produced several recommendations for changes at Ozark Fire Department. Some of these changes will affect the budget, some will affect training (types, scheduling, funding), and some will affect attitudes.

Salary schedules should be reviewed and adjusted to ensure Ozark Fire Department's salaries are competitive through all steps. Large municipal departments and the federal departments will most likely continue to offer higher salaries, which a smaller department such as Ozark will be unable to match. However, efforts must be made to be competitive with departments of similar size. The positions of driver and fire-medic are in place, but are not promotional positions but are only step increases in pay. This position should be changed to a sergeants position and be the first promotional step. The shift captains should come off the trucks and respond in a command vehicle. These captains should be replaced on the trucks with lieutenants and would create three additional promotional positions. Two additional slots added to the Training/EMS staff would also open two additional promotional positions and assist with the additional training classes that will be necessary.

City administration should review the current insurance company, coverage, and cost to determine if other companies may offer better rates and/or expanded coverage.

To meet the educational needs of the departmental personnel, the training office will need to diversify the training to meet the needs of the department and desires of the personnel. Training should provide additional classes (basic level and upper level) on topics, such as, management, leadership, and technical rescue. A tuition assistance program for personnel to attend courses at Alabama Fire College and local colleges and universities should be established.

To encourage additional involvement, committees made up of a mix of the firefighters and officers from all shifts should be established. These committees would have the

responsibility of researching information on fire equipment, personal protective gear, emergency medical equipment, uniforms, SOG development and update, and other areas of concern of shift personnel. After the research and evaluation, recommendations would be made to the department management on items that best met the needs of the department. The department management would then make the final decision on the project.

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Appendix A

Ozark Fire Department
Employee Retention Interview
Employee

Length of service

Position/Rank

Satisfaction level very unsatisfied-1unsatisfied-2   somewhat satisfied-3
satisfied-4   very satisfied-5

Overall	1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	5☐
Position	1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	5☐
Salary/Benefits	1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	5☐
Insurance	1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	5☐
Retirement options	1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	5☐
Leave time	1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	5☐
Involvement	1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	5☐
Supervisors	1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	5☐
Leadership	1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	5☐
Organizational direction	1☐	2☐	3☐	4☐	5☐

What do you think is the primary reason personnel leave Ozark Fire Department?

If you could change one issue that would impact the attrition rate what would it be?

What would you do to make the workplace better?

Appendix B

This survey is to assist me in my completion of a research project for the EFO program at the National Fire Academy. It should only take about five to ten minutes to complete, and is in reference to your employment with Ozark Fire Department. Your responses will be confidential. If you have any questions please contact Bart Harden at (334) 774-1684, 498-3155, or by e-mail at ofd@ozarkalabama.us. Thank you for your time

How long were you employed by Ozark Fire Department?
1. Less than 1 year
2. 1-2 years
3. 2-3 years
4. 3-4 years
5. 4-5 years
6. More than 5 years

Which of the following influenced your decision to leave Ozark Fire Department? (please check all that apply)
1. Salary
2. Benefits
3. Insurance (cost/coverage)
4. Promotional Opportunities
5. Department Size
6. Department Leadership
7. Educational Opportunities
8. Other

What would you classify as the primary reason you chose to leave?

During your employment with Ozark Fire Department how satisfied were you with the following?

	Very Unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Salary	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Leave Time	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Leave Availability	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Insurance Cost	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏

Insurance Coverage	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Promotional Opportunities	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Department Size	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Department Leadership/Management	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Educational Opportunities	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Treatment by Co-workers	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Shift Assignment	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Shift Supervisor	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Organizations Concern for Safety	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑